fora and in Parliament, consistently opposed unilateral armed action against Iraq and has called for the resolution of the outstanding issues through political and diplomatic means under the auspices of the United Nations. India welcomes the unanimous adoption of Resolution 1441 by the Security Council on 8th November, which provides for the return of weapons inspectors to Iraq. Subsequently, Iraq has also conveyed its acceptance of Resolution 1441. India believes that sanctions against Iraq should be lifted in tandem with full and effective compliance by Iraq of the relevant Security Council resolutions.

Second road link between Agartala and Dhaka

285. SHRIMATI VANGA GEETHA: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether India and Bangladesh are going to open a second road link connecting Agartala in Tripura with Dhaka in Bangladesh;

(b)"if so, by when this route would be operational; and

(c) the other details in this regard?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI DIGVIJAY SINGH): (a) Yes. The Governments of India and Bangladesh have signed an Agreement and a Protocol to operate a passenger bus service between Agartala and Dhaka on July 10, 2001 in Dhaka.

(b) and (c) Discussions are underway with Government of Bangladesh to make the bus service operational.

Fishermen detained in Sri Lankan waters

286. SHRIMATI VANGA GEETHA: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that 103 fishermen, with their machanised boats, were detained in Sri Lankan waters on the 25th September, 2002;

(b) if so, the details in this regard; and

(c) when they were released?

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI YASHWANT SINHA): (a) to (c) Government is not aware of any such incident occurring on 25th September, 2002.

However, on 18th September, 2002 102 Indian fishermen and 25 trawlers were apprehended by Pesalai, District Mannar Fishermen Cooperative Society for allegedly poaching in Sri Lankan waters. Upon immediate intervention by the Government of India through our High Commission in Colombo the fishermen were released on 20th September, 2002.

Issuance of passports to Indians in Italy

287. SHRI BALWANT SINGH RAMOOWALIA: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) the number of persons claiming to be Indians who were issued "authority slips" by Indian missions in Rome and Milan since June, 2002 to the 8th November, 2002;

(b) the number of such cases referred back to PIOs in India for clearances in India including authority slip receivers and duplicate passport seekers; and

(c) the break up of cases cleared by PIOs Jalandhar, Chandigarh, Delhi, Bareilly and Jaipur and number of passports issued by Indian missions on the basis of clearance notes alongwith the number of pending cases and reasons therefor?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI DIGVIJAY SINGH): (a) During the period 1st June— 8th November, 2002, a total of 3429 persons claiming to be Indian citizens have been issued authority slips by our Embassy in Rome and 1223 such persons have been issued authority slips by our Consulate in Milan.

(b) All these cases have been referred to the concerned Passport Issuing Offices. Out of the 3429 authority slip receivers in Rome, 3298 cases were referred to the Passport Issuing Authorities in India. The remaining cases pertain to our Embassies / Consulates abroad. All the 1223 cases received in the Indian Consulate in Milan have been referred back to PIOs in India.